

VHA Psychiatric Inpatients Stay Longer in Cold, Wet Climates

VISN 1 MIRECC health services researchers have recently discovered that climate has a significant impact on how long VHA psychiatric inpatients stay in the hospital. By correlating climate factors from the National Weather Service with length of stay for 134 VHA hospitals nationwide, Dr. Edward Federman found that hospitals in colder and wetter climates have greater lengths of stay. Winter and Fall are the two times of year that account for this difference. Recent general reductions in inpatient length of stay have not changed this relationship. While this impact of weather on hospital stays makes intuitive sense, it has been ignored in budget planning, performance monitoring and health services research to date. Bad weather is likely to restrict discharge options for veterans with mental illness who have limited access to safe and stable housing. Other members of this MIRECC research team included Drs. Charles Drebbling, Charles Boisvert, Walter Penk, Gregroy Binus and Robert Rosenheck.